NORTH CAROLINA
MUSEUM OF HISTORY

History Happens Here

Farm Life History Mystery

Distance Learning Program

Teacher Supplement

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Program Overview

Farm Life History Mystery focuses on ways that historians unravel mysteries from the past. Through interactive discussions and hands-on activities, students will become historians as they use observations, hypothesis, and analysis to identify artifacts from long ago.

The **Program Materials** cover activities integrated into the one-hour program. They include an artifact identification exercise and a work sheet.

The **Preprogram Activities** include a discussion sheet and a work sheet. The **Postprogram Activities** include an artifact summary, several articles from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine, and suggested activities. These materials will encourage students to think about how historians and scientists use observation, analysis, and hypothesis to figure out what happened in the past.

Subject Resources from the North Carolina Museum of History History in a Box Kits

From Farm to Factory: Agriculture and Industry in North Carolina

For most of its history, North Carolina has had a predominantly rural economy. New technology that made farming more efficient also led to the growth of industry in the state. In recent years, the state's economy has turned sharply away from agriculture. Learn the factors—who, what, where, when, and how—that contributed to the shift from farm to factory. Identify objects, analyze historical photographs, study geography and its relationship to food, and learn about life in a mill village, the effects of child labor, and the importance of technology today and in the future. The kit is available for loan for three weeks at no charge (you pay return UPS shipping). To order, call 919-807-7984 or go to http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/edu/HistoryBox.html for an order form.

Primarily North Carolina

What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source? Artifacts, photographs, and **documents** from North Carolina's past help students explore the raw materials used to understand history. Discover what objects and spaces tell about life and society. Working with primary sources gives students skills and confidence in research, writing, and interpretation. The kit is available for loan for three weeks at no charge (you pay return UPS shipping). To order, call 919-807-7984 or go to http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/edu/HistoryBox.html for an order form.

Preprogram Activities: Preprogram Discussion Sheet

Have the students sit around you on the floor or at their desks. Read aloud to them, pausing to ask and answer questions. This discussion sheet is a framework for you to build upon. Feel free to use your own examples that you know will appeal to your students. Key vocabulary is underlined.
Time required: 15 minutes

Have you ever wondered how we know about the way people lived long ago? How do teachers and parents know about life in the "old" days?

Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists study objects made and used by people who lived long ago to learn about the past. They call the objects artifacts. An artifact is any object made or used by a human. It can be pottery, a diary, a plant, or even old garbage!

Historians study artifacts to learn about what happened long ago. Like detectives, they analyze artifacts to learn about what people did, where they went, and what they owned. Historians also use many primary documents to learn about the past. Some common primary documents are journals, inventories, photographs, and diaries.

Many people kept diaries long ago—even young people like you! Do you keep a diary? What things do you (would you) write about?

What could a historian learn by reading your diary?

Did you know that even garbage gives us clues about the past? Some archaeologists dig up garbage from long ago to learn about how people lived. They find this garbage in deep holes where people threw away their old clothing, bones from food, and broken things like plates and bottles. The holes where they find this old garbage are called trash pits, or middens. A modern midden is a landfill. As history detectives, archaeologists analyze discarded objects to learn about the people who made or used them. In the future, archaeologists may dig up our landfills to learn more about how we lived.

What do you think they will find?

Anthropologists study objects, environments, and behaviors to learn about traditions and cultures. They analyze these clues to learn how people lived together in families and communities. Anthropologists also study what people believed in and what kinds of things were important to them.

All of these clues—letters, diaries, objects, environments, and behaviors—tell us about how people lived long ago. Some clues are easier to understand than others, and sometimes even historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists get confused. Still, being a history detective can be great fun!

Preprogram Activities: Be an Anthropologist from the Future!

Time required: 20 minutes

1. What would an anthropologist from the future learn about you by studying your room?

   In the space below, make a list of things that can be found in your room.

2. Imagine that you are an anthropologist from the future who is trying to figure out what the lives of people are like now by studying your room.

   How many people would you think live in this room? ____

   What is your *evidence*, or what makes you think that?

3. What kinds of clothing does the person who lives in this room wear? What is your *evidence*, or what makes you think that?

4. What kinds of things does the person who lives in the room like? Name at least two things that the person probably likes. What is your *evidence*, or what makes you think that?

5. What else can you tell about the person who lives in this room? Be sure to give your *evidence*.

Postprogram Activities

These activities include several articles from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine. If you would like to receive free issues of future magazines, form a Tar Heel Junior Historian Association club in your school. To receive a membership application, please call Jessica Pratt at 919-807-7985, e-mail thjhaclubs@ncmail.net, or visit the museum's Web site at http://www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/thjha/index.html.

1. Continue to study rural life in North Carolina by sharing the article "Memories of Life on the Farm: Putting a Face on Life during the Great Depression" (pages 7–8). Lead a discussion using these questions:
    - Was this family larger or smaller than many families you know today?
    - What is a tenant farmer?
    - What are some differences between the life of the author and your life today?
    - Do you know anyone who lives on a farm?
    - How are their experiences similar or different from those of the author?

2. Make some butter! Butter making has been part of rural home life for centuries (page 9).

3. Guide students in a lesson on "Where Did This Food Come From?" (pages 10–16) to determine which agricultural products are native to North Carolina and which were introduced from other cultures.

4. Share the article "Museum Detectives Use Solid Evidence" (pages 18–22) from the spring 1992 issue of *Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine. Guide students to explore their own material culture by bringing objects from home that tell about themselves, their families, or their culture. Have students work in teams to interpret what the objects suggest about the needs and values of the people who use them.

5. Share the article "Oral Historians Listen to Witnesses" (pages 23–25) from the spring 1992 issue of *Tar Heel Junior Historian* magazine. Have students develop questions and interview family members about the past. Your class may gather general oral history, or they may prefer to focus their investigation around specific questions. Some possibilities might be to examine what young people have done for fun, how the prices of things have changed over time, or how school experiences have changed.

Memories of life on the farm: Putting a face on life during the Great Depression

by Grethel McLamb Boyette

I was born in 1920, the fifth child of seven. My parents were *good* tenant farmers in eastern North Carolina. Now, I say they were "good" tenant farmers because we didn't move every year like the "bad" tenant farmers did. We moved only twice from the time I was born until I was sixteen years old, when my father was able to buy a farm.

We put down roots in our community. We worked hard, behaved ourselves (we were too busy not to), and were good neighbors and friends with our landlords and other "good" **tenants**. During those years, if we were poor—and we were—I didn't know it. Everyone, including most of the landowners we knew, lived like we did. We hardly knew a world unlike our own existed.

In a way, the landowners really had more to lose than we did—we had only ourselves, our animals, and

"Almost everyone tilled the soil with mules throughout the Depression, even though tractors were available."

some farm implements, a wagon, and a buggy. Many, many landowners lost "everything" when they became unable to make payments on their homes, their land, and their taxes.

During the **Depression** years, I believe that most people living on farms lived better than most who lived in the cities or towns—we could raise our own food and cut firewood, and we certainly were not jobless! As a child, I was not aware of how frightened my mother was for us. Or how concerned my father was about what would happen if the crop didn't "bring in" enough money to "pay out" in the fall.

My parents were both from families who owned quite a bit of land. But they had run away and gotten married, against her father's wishes, when they were eighteen years old. So, they were on their own. As with others of the time, children came regularly and often. By the time they were thirty, they had seven children and themselves to feed, shelter, and clothe.

The two homes that I grew up in were big, white, rambling ones with big porches and big rooms. They had wood floors that we scrubbed once a week and wood walls that we scalded with hot **lye** water once a year.

Our mother made all of our clothes except for the large sizes for the men and boys. We had three levels of clothes: play (or work) clothes, school clothes, and Sunday clothes—and one did not cross over those lines! They were handed down in those same categories.

Contrary to the widespread idea that everyone in the Depression wore clothes made from **feed** sacks, I never wore a sack dress. My mother used the sacks for everything from dishtowels to aprons to quilt linings, but she would not make our dresses from them. If I needed a dress, and we had no money, we caught a chicken or gathered a basket of eggs, and I walked to the nearby country store to trade for some cloth.

Our food was cooked on a big wood-burning stove. It was made fresh each day because we had no refrigeration. We caught a chicken, wrung its neck, dressed it, and cooked it right when we needed it. We killed our own hogs and prepared them ourselves, too. We grew corn and took it to the mill to be ground into **meal,** and sometimes we had wheat to be ground for flour.

We grew all our own vegetables and fruits and **canned** what we didn't need right then so we would have some for winter use. We bought only what we couldn't make—such things as sugar and seasonings and medicines. The traveling Watkins man visited us at least once a month. From him, we bought our flavorings and spices and Rosebud Salve (which cured everything but our colds) and Vicks Vaporub ointment (which, when rubbed on our chests, cured them). The fish man came on Fridays with a big box of iced-down fish in the back of his pickup truck. We bought them regularly and fried 'em up quick!

Almost everyone **tilled** the soil with mules throughout the Depression, even though tractors were available. A farmer could till all the acres he could manage until President Roosevelt brought in the **New Deal** policies to lower **production** and raise **prices.** Therefore, we tended a lot of acres, and everyone in the family worked.

Each of us had his or her own jobs to do according to size, age, and strength. We worked in the fields and we worked at the barn. Most women did all the regular house chores and also went to the field or barn. Children started working when they were about six or seven

"The boys would plow before and after school, often until dark."

years old. Most were made a "hand" by the age of eleven or twelve. This honor meant that we could now carry the workload of an adult farmworker. Days could

"If I needed a dress, and we had no money, we caught a chicken or gathered a basket of eggs, and I walked to the nearby country store to trade for some cloth."

start at 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning and end after dark. But no one worked on the farm on Sundays!

We all **chopped** the cotton and tobacco with a hoe. We picked the cotton **boll** by boll and dragged a sack that we filled as we went along. We **topped** the tobacco by hand and removed the **suckers** by hand. We pulled the big, green, horned worms off the tobacco and squashed them under our feet or dropped them into a can of kerosene if we had it along.

In addition to the **cash crops,** cotton and tobacco, we had corn and hay to be grown and harvested. My older brothers pulled the ears of corn by hand and tossed each one into the corn cart that the mule drew slowly along the rows. Getting up hay was everyone's job.

The children of many families, especially the boys, were kept out of school to work on their family farms. Not so at our house—my mother simply would not allow it. I am not sure she ever plowed, but I know some women who did so their boys could go to school. The boys would plow before and after school, often until dark.

My mother knew how hard her life had been, how hard she and my father had to work to just "keep up." My father knew, also, but he couldn't quite envision how to change it. Mother knew our lives would be easier only by us being educated. She set goals for us and my older brother, their third son, went away to college in the middle of the Depression. He paid his tuition by furnishing fruits and vegetables, especially sweet potatoes, to the college for its dining room. He helped me to go to college and I, in turn, helped my younger brother and sister.

The drive and determination that our parents possessed had kept us fed and clothed during the Depression and had made it possible for us to follow paths that they could not have even dreamed about for themselves.

The images and thoughts and feelings of my youth have lasted a lifetime. You can tell that I learned to love the land and to appreciate it. I learned that if you had a job to do, you'd better get it done, or you'd find yourself working in the field at dark on Saturday night. I learned that anyone can overcome a seemingly insurmountable hurdle by keeping a vision and a goal before him or her. And I learned not to waste time or talent and to be creative in finding a way to that goal.

Definitions (continued)

Tending something is paying attention to it, or caring for it.

*In this general sense, **tilling** means plowing, or turning (or "turning under"), the soil—to break apart the soil, which kills weeds and prepares a field for planting. **Tilled** dirt is loose so that seeds can be planted and more easily take root.*

*In this case, **topped** means that the top of the tobacco plant had been cut so the plant's strength could go to building the leaves.*

Grethel McLamb Boyette was a founding member of the Tobacco Farm Life Museum in Kenly. She still sits its board of directors and serves as a full-time docent. As docent, she is assistant to the curator and frequently gives talks about North Carolina farm life. This remembrance is from one of these talks, which she made at a teacher workshop sponsored by the Museum of History.

"Boy plowing with mules" is used courtesy of the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Woman feeding chickens" is from the North Carolina Division of Archives and History. "Man feeding his mules" is from a collection at the Museum of History.

Postprogram Activities: Make Some Butter

Background: Butter making was a common farm chore during colonial times, and it remained a part of rural life until well into the twentieth century. Churning butter was a difficult chore that was tiring and time-consuming. The young girls in a family were usually given the job of churning butter, and they made up rhymes to sing and help pass the time. You can make butter at home using the recipe below. Come up with rhymes and songs while you churn, because a healthy dose of patience is part of the recipe!

Materials

1 quart-size glass jar with screw-top lid	2 cups whipping cream	mixing bowl
4–5 ice cubes (leave in freezer until ready to use)	¼ teaspoon salt	butter dish

Procedure

- Wash the jar and lid thoroughly with a little dish soap and hot water. Dry completely.
- Place the jar in a warm place such as next to the stove or in the sun. Let stand for two hours.
- Put the cream in the jar and tighten on the lid. Hold the jar with one end in each hand.
- Shake the jar up and down nonstop for 15 to 20 minutes. Now is the time to try those rhymes! Pass the jar around the class, so everyone can have a turn.
- As the butter begins to form from the cream, it will separate, or "gather," and stick together in a solid mass. If after 20 minutes, butter has not begun to gather, add a few teaspoons of hot water, replace the lid, and mix again.
- Once the butter ball stops getting any larger, open the jar and pour the buttermilk into small paper cups. Try drinking it. Buttermilk was considered a real treat!
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water.
- You may follow the steps for salting and molding, or just spread some butter from the jar on crackers or bread slices and enjoy!
- For salting and molding, put the butter in the mixing bowl and add the ice cubes. As the ice melts, work in the water just until the butter feels cold. Discard the remaining ice cubes and water.
- Sprinkle the salt evenly over the surface of the butter and then mix it into the butter until it completely disappears.
- Pat the butter into a cookie mold or butter mold.
- Let the butter harden just a bit in a refrigerator, then carefully remove it from the mold (with a knife if there is no plunger) and enjoy!

Postprogram Activities: Where Did This Food Come From?

Competency Goals
Grade 4: Social Studies—Goals 1, 2, 3

Objectives
Determine which agricultural products are native to North Carolina and which were introduced from other continents.

Introduction
Some of North Carolina's plants and animals are native to North America, and others were introduced from Europe and Africa. Over time, the state's American Indian, European, and African populations exchanged information about faming and food.

Materials
- "European Farmers in a New World"
- "They Were the First to Use This Land: Native American Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture"
- "African Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture"
- Activity Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?
- Answer Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Procedure
1. Introduce this activity by discussing how many of the foods we grow and eat today came from other places. Ask the students if they can name any of these "foreign" foods and where they came from.
2. Divide the class into three groups. Each group will work together to read an article and complete the top portion of the activity sheet, listing foods mentioned in the article. Reunite the class to complete the bottom portion.
3. Lead a group discussion, asking the students about their reactions to what they have learned. Were they surprised by where foods originated? How does this affect their views about where our foods come from? Why is the list of foods introduced from Africa shorter than the other two lists? (Africans who were taken from their homelands and brought to North Carolina during the colonial period had little time or opportunity to bring plants, seeds, or livestock with them.)

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European Farmers in a New World

By Wayne Rudolph

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

Like a three-legged stool, American farming stands on the contributions of three strong legs—one leg representing the legacy of the native farmers of this land, a second recognizing the contributions of imported Africans, and a third noting the impacts of European immigrants.

For the most part, Europeans had been farming fields in their homelands that had been cleared for hundreds, even thousands, of years. In the area that became North Carolina, though, they found only small areas that had been cleared. These areas had been cleared, used, and abandoned by the natives. More often, the newcomers found a land that was covered with huge trees or dense undergrowth—no place for a farm that needed open space and sunlight. So they cleared the land. . . .

Once sunshine could reach the ground, the Europeans began farming. They created small hills among the stumps and girdled trees where they could raise crops. Where they could, they planted rows of crops in open fields.

All of these practices were similar to the practices of the native people in this area. In fact, some of the practices were learned from those natives. But, for the most part, that was the end of similarity. The natives and the Europeans had long used different methods of supplying shelter, clothing, and food. . . .

The earliest immigrant farmers had quickly learned to raise corn using seeds and techniques they learned from the native peoples who already lived here. But they had to use familiar farming techniques from the Old World to raise "small grains" they had brought with them—oats, rye, and barley, but mainly wheat.

Raising these grains could not be done using the native ways—by planting a few seeds on the tops of raised hills. Instead, English farmers introduced European practices to raise these European crops. Those practices included draft power as well as a variety of European equipment and tools that could make use of that power. . .

When the Europeans arrived, they also introduced domesticated livestock. Animals that had not provided meat during the long ocean journey to the colonies became the parents of American herds and flocks of goats, sheep, hogs, cattle, and poultry. Horses and oxen were also brought from Europe—but not for food! These animals improved land transportation and provided draft power for farm work.

In addition, the European immigrants brought cultivated plants with them. Many types of garden vegetables, cooking herbs, and tree fruits like apples, peaches, and pears were quickly introduced to the colonies. . . .

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They Were First to Use This Land: Native American Influences of North Carolina's Agriculture

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

Who were the first? You might have guessed that the natives whom the earliest Europeans met were first. And that would have been a good guess. But, even before these natives were first seen by Europeans four hundred years ago, their ancestors were living in this land that has become North Carolina.

Ideas that native storytellers have passed along from generation to generation tell us that these native ancestors have always lived on this land. Archaeologists, though (at least some of them) believe these ancestors migrated here during the Ice Age. (Others are studying new evidence from recent discoveries to see if the ancestors of America's native peoples may actually have been around thousands of years earlier.)

Regardless, these people were the first to use this land. They did not use it to grow or raise food, however—they did not farm it. They did not cultivate crops on it or raise domesticated livestock on it. Instead, they hunted on it and gathered from it what they needed to survive.

Archaeologists describe the earliest of these people as members of the Paleo-Indian culture. Paleo-Indians hunted and gathered their food in the wild. [They lived more than 10,000 years ago.] . . .

A second culture of people, the Archaic Indian culture, lived from about 9000 B.C. until about 2000 B.C. They, too, were hunters and gatherers. However, the Archaic Indians had the advantage of a better climate that supported a larger variety of animals and plants. These natives still migrated to find food, following animal herds and gathering ripening plants, nuts, and berries. They might have traveled to the coast in the spring for fish and seafood; to the "flatlands" in the summer for nuts, fruits and small game; and to the mountains in the fall for berries, roots, herbs, and large game. . . .

By about 2000 B.C., the Woodland Indian culture started settling in villages. More importantly, they started learning to plant, tend, and harvest some of the food they needed. The villages of the Woodland Indians were often established along rivers and streams—places where the soil was rich and where water was easily accessible. Here, the women, who had already taken on the role of being the community's farmers, generally grew squash, beans, and maize for food.

While the Woodland Indians had begun to grow some crops for food, they still ate large amounts of wild plants they gathered from their surrounding environment. The women gathered fruits, berries, and cherries, as well as nuts, seeds, roots, and wild sweet potatoes. The men continued to hunt wild game, such as turkeys.

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By the time the earliest European explorers and colonists arrived in this area, descendants of the Woodland Indians were still gathering and hunting. But they had also developed a very successful economy that was based in agriculture. They were using tools that they made from stones, shells, bones, and wood. They were trading items such as tobacco, which they grew and used in a variety of ceremonies.

Maize [corn] was the most important crop for Native Americans. They grew maize on small mounds that they placed in clearings among the trees as well as in small open fields near rivers. On the mounds with the maize, the natives planted beans. Around the mounds and between them, they planted squash, pumpkins, and gourds. These three crops (maize, beans, and squash) were known as the "Three Sisters." . . .

Contact between [the native and European] cultures changed the farming practices and eating habits of both peoples. Many, many years down the road, those blended changes would lead to the development of a new farming culture in this land. That culture would be distinctly American.

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African Influences on North Carolina's Agriculture

By Peter H. Wood

Excerpts from *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 38:1 (fall 1998).

By the time of the Tuscarora War (1711–1715), natives, Africans, and Europeans were in constant contact. They watched each other, they taught each other, they learned from each other. They exchanged information about warfare and trade, about religion and music, about housing and language, and about farming and food.

At first, the natives, because they had lived in the area the longest, had the most to teach the newcomers about unfamiliar plants, strange animals, different soils, and local weather. But soon the Europeans and Africans were learning and borrowing ideas and practices from each other . . .

Though the people from Africa could not bring material possessions with them, some slave trading ships transported cargoes of African animals, plants, and seeds with their human cargo. Other African cargo entered the United States on other kinds of transport ships from Europe or Asia.

Two of the crops that were introduced from "Guinea," as Africa was sometimes called by Atlantic traders, included peanuts and cotton. As Africans were reunited with these plants, they guided some planters to grow them. They also taught how to raise "guinea corn" to feed hogs and poultry and how to use "guinea grass" as fodder.

In addition, these Africans sometimes raised "guinea melons" in their gardens and "guinea hens" in their barnyards. Africans in the colony often raised yams and okra in their garden plots, as well. Over time, they showed Europeans how to cook and eat these unfamiliar delicacies, too.

One of their largest contributions was rice. Africans were the pioneers who knew about rice. Rice, which came from the "Rice Coast" of West Africa, proved to be a crucial moneymaking crop along parts of the coastal Carolinas and Georgia during the 1700s. Persons who were captured from this part of Africa became valuable assets in the New World—they knew how to plant, harvest, and process the valuable grain.

Postprogram Activities:
Activity Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Directions: Not all of North Carolina's agricultural products are native to the state. Many items were brought here from other places. As you listen to or read the articles, list in the space below the agricultural products that are mentioned.

Directions: As a group, list each product under its place of origin.

Introduced from Europe	Introduced from Africa	Native to North Carolina

Postprogram Activities:
Answer Sheet: Where Did This Food Come From?

Directions: Not all of North Carolina's agricultural products are native to the state. Many items were brought here from other places. As you listen to or read the articles, list in the space below the agricultural products that are mentioned.

apples	guinea corn	pears	turkeys
barley	guinea grass	poultry	wheat
beans	guinea hens	pumpkins	wild berries
cattle	guinea melons	rice	wild fruits
cherries	hogs	rye	wild game
cooking herbs	maize, or corn	seafood	wild nuts
cotton	oats	sheep	wild plants
fish	okra	squash	wild roots
garden vegetables	peaches	sweet potatoes	yams
goats	peanuts	tobacco	

Introduced from Europe	Introduced from Africa	Native to North Carolina
apples	cotton	beans
barley	guinea corn	cherries
cattle	guinea grass	fish
cooking herbs	guinea hens	maize, or corn
garden vegetables	guinea melon	pumpkins
goats	okra	seafood
hogs	peanuts	squash
oats	rice	sweet potatoes
peaches	yams	tobacco
pears		turkeys
poultry		wild berries
rye		wild fruits
sheep		wild game
wheat		wild nuts
		wild plants
		wild roots

Museum detectives use solid evidence

By Wesley S. Creel

People have always made and used things in their lives. Those things may be as simple as a pin or a bow and arrow or as complex as a car or the space shuttle. History detectives who study them can tell the history of people, places, or events by looking at these things and understanding how and why they were used. They call these old objects artifacts, and the study of these objects and the people who used them they call **material culture**.

How do you think museum detectives can tell about the history of people through their artifacts? Think about what it would be like if you found something on the ground you had never seen before. How would you find out what it is? You might ask your friends, your parents, or your teachers. You might look it up in a book. It would take some time, but you probably could find information about it. These history detectives do the same thing.

The first step that museum detectives take in investigating artifacts is called description. This step has two parts. During the first part, museum registrars measure the artifact. Using rulers they measure width, height, and length. Then they turn the artifacts over to curators for the second part of description.

Curators and their assistants, called catalogers, look at the artifact very carefully and closely to describe what it is made of and how they think it was made. Sometimes they cannot tell much about an object by looking at it. So, they must talk to someone who used it or made it or someone who is an expert in this kind of artifact. They may even look for other things like it in reference books.

Curators and catalogers also do historical research. It might include information from secondary sources like county histories or primary sources like census reports, oral history interviews, or personal papers. This research explains why an artifact is historically important and how it fits into a society or a culture.

During this part they ask questions and try to find answers: how is this artifact different from any other artifact? How is it similar? How does it fit into the area or the time period? But one of the most important questions they ask is: what was it originally used for?

This basket was found along with other artifacts in Polk County. Museum detectives describe, document, classify, and interpret objects like this so that we can learn more about ourselves and North Carolina history.

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Now the curators begin the second step called documentation and classification. In documentation, they want to know more about the artifact: how it was made, how it was used, why one material was used instead of another, why it was designed the way it was, why it was made and used, who used it, how they used it, and when they used it.

Based on their research investigation and answers to these questions in documentation, museum curators and their assistants try to place the artifact they are investigating into a category. This is called classification. You may want to think of categories in this way. There are different kinds of clothes: socks, shoes, shirts, pants, underclothes, sweaters, and coats. These are categories—or classes—of clothes and they are grouped by their different uses—what they were originally used for. So museum curators use a similar system to classify artifacts according to what they were originally used for.

The third step—called interpretation—is conducted by many different people in the museum who use information from the curator's investigation. The museum curators and catalogers write scholarly articles and books or give lectures. They also provide information about artifacts to exhibit designers who will create exhibits and educators who will create educational programs. Museum educators produce audiovisual programs, arrange demonstrations, produce publications, and give tours and talks.

We have described how museum detectives—registrars, curators, catalogers, exhibit designers, and educators—study material culture and explain it to visitors. Now we are going to provide an artifact example so that you can investigate it with us. Recently, museum detectives went to the Jackson family farm near Tryon in Polk County to investigate and pick up a large collection of artifacts. The Jackson family owned hundreds of things they had used on their farm from the 1850s to the 1920s, including farm tools and equipment, furniture, clothing, kitchen utensils, quilts and coverlets, and weapons.

During their work, one artifact stood out: a wooden basket. Let's go through the description, documentation and classification, and interpretation processes for this basket.

The registrars begin the description process. The basket measures 14 1/4 inches high, 17 5/8 inches long, and 16 inches wide. The curators and catalogers now take a closer look. The handle and the rods—long, thin, young branches of wood—are made of oak, with metal wire to replace broken or missing ones. It was made by hand by taking the rods and weaving them together.

Curators and catalogers begin the next step, documentation and classification. Documentation is first. They

In description, museum registrars measure the basket and describe its appearance.

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compare this basket to other baskets they have seen in the museum, in other museums, or in reference books. They discover that metal buckets, tin cans, glass jars, and other machine-made containers were rare on a farm in the piedmont foothills in the 1800s. Baskets were among the most common containers during this period. They could have been made from local and inexpensive materials, and often they were made by family members or by neighbors. Baskets were used to carry laundry, to carry vegetables from the garden to the house, or to carry wood from the woodshed for heating and cooking stoves.

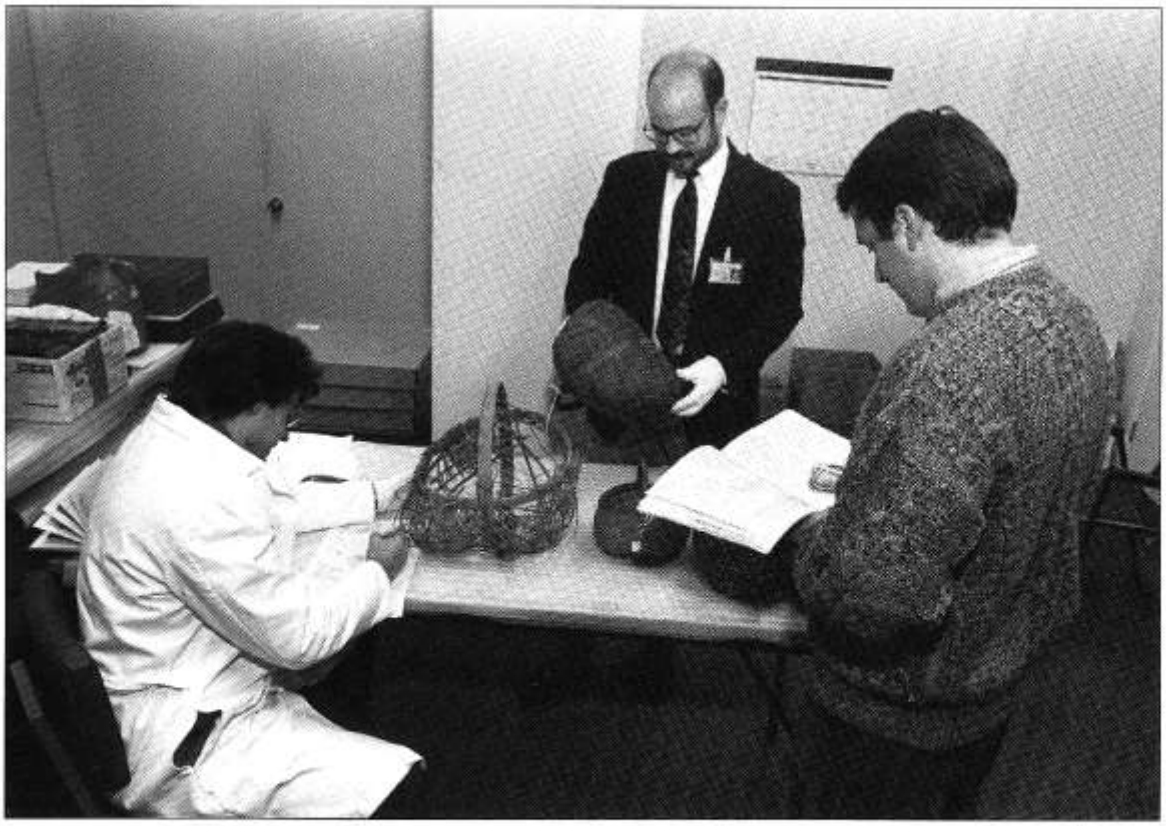
Comparing this basket to other baskets of different shapes and sizes, detectives think it was used to carry eggs. And they think that it was used during the late 1800s and early 1900s in this area. And being made of oak splints, it was made of the same materials as other baskets during this time.

Now the curators and catalogers have questions about the people who made and used the basket. For instance, were the eggs collected by the family for the family? Were they collected to sell for cash? Or were they collected for both? Which person in the family used the basket to collect eggs? Was collecting eggs a job for an adult or a child? Was it a job for a grandparent or a parent? Did a man or woman collect the eggs? If a child collected the eggs, was it the oldest or the youngest? Was it a boy or girl?

Sometimes they ask questions that have no answers and have to guess. Why did the owners keep the basket when it was in such bad shape? Why did the owner of the basket keep repairing it and using it? These are some of the answers they came up with. Perhaps it was in bad shape and the eggs could have fallen out. Perhaps the family was poor and it was the only basket. Maybe the family placed a high value on saving money by using something over and over again for a long time. Maybe it was a "good luck" egg basket. Maybe the basket meant something special to its owner.

Now they look the basket up in a special museum book to see how it fits in different classes of similar or different baskets. This way of classifying is used not only in this museum but in other museums throughout the world. The basket fits into the large class of objects called "Tools and equipment." Within that class it fits in the "Agricultural tools and equipment" class and then into a smaller one called "Baskets, gathering."

The museum curators and educa-



In documentation and classification, museum curators and catalogers try to understand how this basket is like and unlike other baskets. To do this, they read books and compare this basket to other baskets in the museum. They use this information to understand the hows, wheres, and whys of North Carolina history.

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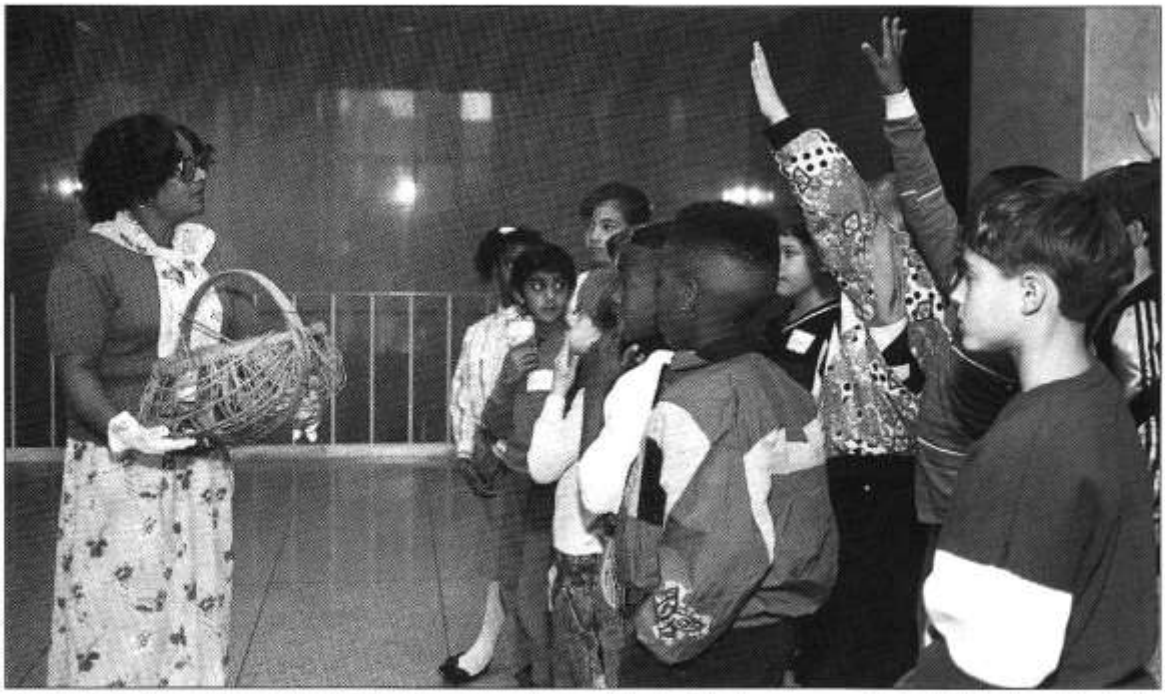

After description, documentation, and classification, this museum educator explains to visitors the importance of the basket in the lives of farm families living in piedmont North Carolina in the late 1880s and early 1900s.

tors work together to tell the story of the basket for people who visit the museum. The curators provide educators with their historical research and their description, documentation, and classification information. Educators use this information to develop interpretive programs and publications, including touch talks, slide programs, and gallery tours. The purpose of the N.C. Museum of History is to "interpret the culture and social, economic, and political history of North Carolina from prehistory to the present; and to collect, preserve, and utilize artifacts and other material significant to the state." So curators and educators must use the basket to tell North Carolinians about some part of their history.

This basket is solid evidence of a group of people who lived and worked on a piedmont farm not too long ago. Museum detectives will use this evidence to explain about North Carolina history.

You can start your own investigation about your material culture. You can start in your house. Do you have any artifacts like egg baskets? Do you have any objects that you use, like an egg basket, to gather food? Is there an object in your house that you would like to know about? What kind of artifacts do you or your parents own that they use in the kitchen? What does that artifact tell you about you? Your family? Your house, your county, your state? What does that artifact tell you about your material culture? You may end up with more questions than answers. ❐

Definition

Material culture is all the objects or tools—artifacts—and the group of people who use them. Museum detectives who study material culture are interested in finding out about how, where, when, and why people use artifacts. They are also interested in

- people dealing with their natural environment (when, how, and where they make shelter, get food, protect themselves from the weather—heat, cold, sun, rain, wind)
- people relating to other people (when they show wealth or status by wearing expensive clothes or work clothes; wearing lots of gold jewelry; driving big expensive cars, small foreign cars, family vans, or four-wheel drive vehicles)
- people expressing their thoughts and ideas (when they speak, create art, or worship)

Oral historians listen to witnesses

by Anne R. Phillips

I met Nevada Jane Hall in 1986 when she was ninety-eight years old. She lived alone in a two-story, white frame house off Lynchburg Road on the western edge of Stokes County. "Moved from over yonder in Surry County, lived in a log house over there, two little rooms," she remembers. Her family moved to the Stokes County house in 1891. Nevada Jane, called Miss Vadie, was three years old at the time and sat on top of a wagon load of corn pulled by two borrowed white horses.

Yet life was still tough after she moved with her family: "Traded him [an old horse] for a pair of old mules. How in the world with three children—wasn't one of them big enough to work how they lived. No openings to plant a garden nor nothing. I'll tell you, though, Mama saved

Nevada Jane Hall, Miss Vadie, remembers moving from Surry County to this house in Stokes County in 1891. In oral history interviews, she tells her family history. If this history of her family is similar to many farm families in the piedmont in the early 1900s, how could her oral history help history detectives?

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Miss Vadie as a young woman (on the right) with one of her sisters.

everything. They had to or couldn't have lived."

History detectives often use oral history from people like Miss Vadie to capture personal information. Sometimes this information cannot be found in other primary sources like diaries and letters. People being interviewed by oral historians are like witnesses. Historians carry on conversations with them, explore new directions, follow up points, or ask more about something they find important or interesting. The witnesses can explain thoughts and feelings. For example, Miss Vadie was amazed that her mother could provide clothes for the family with as little as they had: "How she dressed those children, I don't know. She had an aunt that had an old loom, and she'd make cloth so we had wool clothes to wear through the winter. When we got up big enough, they taught us how to knit. With a kerosene lamp, little bitty cookstove, Becky, Mama, and me would set there and knit every night. Figuring about two pair of stockings apiece, and they would last all winter. If the legs was good, next winter ravel them off and knit down below, and they would go another year."

Oral history also fills in gaps left unsaid by other sources. Some history books tell us facts and explain ideas, but they sometimes do not give us details about people or how they felt. Miss Vadie tells that she liked outdoor work. We rarely find this sort of information in books: "I always wished I'd been a man; all I wanted to do was to get out in the fields. Mother did all the cooking. I'd take some twine and I'd knit some mittens; leave your fingers out. Fit them to use your hoe, so your hands would stay white. Long sleeves. I never did burn my skin. We'd plant corn. We'd take a gooseneck hoe. Follow that plow every row."

How does the oral historian study history? The oral historian gathers history by interviewing someone—asking questions. The oral historian points them in a direction or train of thought and listens to the answer and records it on tape. These are often descriptions about themselves, family, community, and events. When Miss Vadie and I talked about tobacco harvesting, I wanted to know more details about selling tobacco. I asked a question and this is what she told me: "After the family primed tobacco . . . they got it cured out, we'd take all the leaves off them stalks, grade it, then tie it up in a bundle. You had to tie it nice. That ain't half of it. Tie that over, and then put it on a two-horse wagon. Drive to Winston-Salem on a dirt road and be gone for three days to sell tobacco."

The first oral history interviews I did were with my own family. I wanted to know, for instance, about

Miss Vadie at a recent birthday party.

my mother's life as a teacher and her own mother's life as a teacher in rural Mecklenburg County, Virginia. So I asked Mama the questions I wanted to know most. What was her mother like? Did Grandmother and Grandfather write letters to each other when they were courting? How did Mama feel when her own mother died when Mama was only eight years old? Why did Mama decide to study music? Only by asking Mama these questions could I find answers. I am grateful that she allowed me to tape-record our conversations.

So when I interviewed Miss Vadie, I asked her some of the questions I had asked Mama. What was Miss Vadie's mother like? Her father? In Miss Vadie's family, who liked to cook? Who built the fires in the woodstove? Did Miss Vadie's mother work in the fields with the crops? Did her sisters prefer work in the fields or in the house? Some information I gleaned by direct questions to Miss Vadie. Other information she volunteered without my questioning.

The *way* Miss Vadie told information as well as *what* she told was important. We do not have that kind of richness when we read letters or books and cannot hear the tone of voice. So the way Miss Vadie looked or spoke, the way she laughed or raised her eyebrows, added more to the story.

To be a good oral historian, you must establish rapport—a sense of trust. Sometimes a neighbor or friend of someone you want to interview must introduce you to that person. In my case, with Miss Vadie, the county librarian suggested that I talk to her: "But she may not let you in." I was hoping Miss Vadie would have good information, but I would have to respect her feelings, or she might not let me in the door at all. When I knocked, she let me in. I told her I wanted to know more about farm women and asked if we could talk. From that moment on, we not only shared information and trusted each other but also became good friends.

It is a good idea to request permission in writing to interview. This protects you and the interviewee from misunderstandings. Some interview forms give the interviewer permission to tape-record or permission to donate the tape to a school or county library.

In interviewing, the oral historian should follow these suggestions:

- Go on the interview by yourself.
- Interview only one person at a time.
- If the television is on when you arrive, visit a little bit and then ask permission to turn it off during the interview.
- Remember that background noises may be a distraction on the tape.
- When you are finished, label the tape with your name, the interviewee's name, the date, and the place.

Miss Vadie's life is her story. Her accounts of her thoughts and feelings give a picture of her life growing up on a farm in the northwestern piedmont of North Carolina. Her story helps the student of history to learn more than what can be found in history books, more about individual lives. It also helps to place those lives in the larger picture of North Carolina history.

How was Nevada Jane Hall's life similar to stories you have heard from your aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents? How would your grandparents describe their childhoods? If you would like to know, ask them. They might have a story for you. ❐

Contact Information

We hope that you have enjoyed taking part in this distance learning program. We invite your comments and questions. Please take advantage of other distance learning programs offered by the North Carolina Museum of History, including History-in-a-Box kits, videos on demand, educator notebooks, and the Tar Heel Junior Historian Association, as well as professional development opportunities for educators. For more information, visit http://www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/edu/Classroom.html.

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